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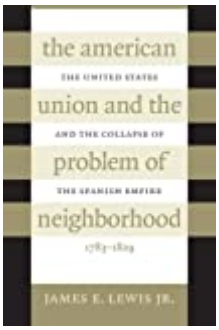

James L. Jr.. Lewis. *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. xi + 304 pp. $49.95 (cloth); $18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4736-7.

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Until very recently, any discussion of United States-Spanish relations in the early republic required reference to Samuel Flagg Bemis and A.P. Whitaker. Generations accepted the parameters of the Bemis-Whitaker debates focusing upon the personalities of key participants and the judgement of treaties from Jay-Gardoqui to Adams-Onis that sought to resolve problems concerning trade, boundary disputes, and Latin American rebellion. While there is merit to such discussion, fortunately, within the past decade, diplomatic history has taken a new direction. Scholars such as John J. Johnson, William Earl Weeks, Lester D. Langley, Frank L. Owsley, Jr., and Gene A. Smith have taken the field into race, religion, empire, and comparative revolution as critical areas for examination. This volume by James E. Lewis, Jr. is yet another welcome addition to the genre.[1]

Lewis treads familiar ground in detailing the dissolution of the Spanish empire. The Louisiana Purchase, West Florida, the Adams-Onis (Transcontinental) Treaty, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Panama Congress are all topics for consideration. The author's focus, however, rests not upon a re-examination of diplomatic correspondence and treaty provisions; rather, he emphasizes the evolutionary views of American policy makers within the context of the place of "union" and "neighborhood" as defined by the Founding Fathers and transformed by new goals and leadership of the following generation by 1829. Lewis contends that the Founding Fathers recognized the tenuous nature of the new union and believed it could be stabilized through the promotion of national independence, republican government, commercial prosperity, and territorial empire. A system of semi-sovereign states under the Constitution replaced the more contentious Articles of Confederation and eliminated the problem of "neighborhood"–competing states that might engage in commercial or military rivalry. The American union under the Constitution provided for a combination of national resources and commercial strength while guarding against the dreaded intervention and influence of the European powers.

The Founding Fathers maintained hope for such a union in part because the remainder of the hemisphere was held in colonial subservience. American policy makers faced the major crisis in their thinking as they witnessed the collapse of the Spanish empire and attempted to reconcile the concept of union and the newly emerging nations of Latin America. Should the United States welcome these new states into the American union or should they be excluded–thus creating a potentially dangerous or competitive neighbor? Lewis ably sets the backdrop for this ultimate decision by discussing the east-west divisions that sparked heated debate between Republican

and Federalist politicos during the Jefferson and Madison presidencies. Lewis argues that historians have misfocused their attention on the "affair of Louisiana"; Jefferson was more concerned about the stability of the union than a French trans-Mississippi presence. Republican policy makers also feared the rising tide of colonial revolution and the issues that would be generated by the "neighborhood" problems of Florida, Cuba, and Mexico. Americans coveted these territories to varying degrees and consequently independence was not an option promoted by the administration.

Lewis notes that while the Republicans succeeded in applying their unionist philosophy to problems both east and west and to the Spanish empire through 1815, deeper questions of governance revealed themselves. Popular rejection of the embargo and the ineffectual exercise of federal power during the War of 1812 demonstrated both an absence of confidence and mistrust of the national government. The euphoria that accompanied the Treaty of Ghent and victory at New Orleans did not reflect a renewed faith in Washington. Indeed, Lewis declares, Americans preferred state and local power, urging government to stay out of their lives and their pocketbooks, except for eliminating the Spanish, Indians, and British trade restrictions. The author contends that "passive" unionists, such as Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, remained optimistic about the fate of the nation. They recognized that problems existed, however, and argued for a stronger defense, political unity, and an "American System" as ways to insure solidarity. Henry Clay, John Quincy Adams, and John C. Calhoun–"active" unionists–endorsed the solutions of their counterparts, but, fearful of internal divisions, also urged a strengthening of the bonds of union though the energetic exercise of federal authority. Both groups, however, opposed war and its splintering impact on the nation.

American policy makers faced a new dilemma in the post-war period as they sought to take a position on the Latin American revolutions and acquire Florida, while avoiding war with Spain and England. Monroe and Clay saw benefits to be gained from the collapse of the Spanish empire, but Adams expressed very real reservations. Through 1819, the Secretary of State successfully blocked an aggressive posture regarding recognition that had won Clay's support and Monroe's interest. Adams substituted a policy of patience and discretion that triumphed, giving the United States both Florida and additional claims to the Pacific Northwest. While most Americans praised the Transcontinental Treaty, anger arose over Spain's refusal to ratify the treaty promptly and over the cession of the claim to Texas. When combined with domestic problems, such as the Missouri Compromise and the Panic of 1819, sectional differences festered. The crises of 1819-1821 undermined the union and the federal government. In a sudden reversal of policy in 1822, Monroe and Adams decided to recognize five new Latin American countries. This dramatic departure marks a watershed in United States History–an acknowledgment that union was limited and that the best course of action would be to urge the emerging nations to adopt the American model of representative government and liberal commerce. Lewis stresses that historians have failed to appreciate the importance of the suddenness of this policy shift and the concession that we had become part of a "neighborhood" with all of its threatening possibilities.

Monroe and Adams labored mightily to keep the Latin American nations isolated–for the benefit of the United States, of course, as much as the Latins themselves. The Monroe Doctrine served, Lewis suggests, as a somewhat hesitant and flexible response to the rumor of European intervention. The presence of the Holy Alliance in the "neighborhood" was simply unacceptable to the United States. The administration, responsive to European actions and Congressional moods, but not Latin American sensitivities, withheld an open pledge of military support and kept the option open of a joint response with Great Britain. While European intervention did not occur in the 1820s, the Adams presidency failed to secure union at home or abroad. Adams' nationalistic domestic agenda foundered in a sea of states' rights fears and jealousies, while his foreign policy was battered by Congressional opposition and uncooperative rival nations. "Everywhere Adams and Clay expected success," Lewis writes, "they found failure" (p. 199). More troubling, they had abandoned their unionist goals for a traditional European balance of power. They admitted that unionist logic could not be applied to the entire hemisphere. By 1829, Americans seemed more concerned about the threat of the federal government to the union than any external dangers. Andrew Jackson recognized and exploited this notion, espousing a limited domestic agenda and a foreign policy aimed towards expansion of empire and away from defense of union. Adams and Clay emerge then, not as the vanguard of an new imperial thrust, but as the rearguard of the proponents of a concept of union that had been "disavowed by the public and discarded by the policy makers" (p. 218).

Professor Lewis should be lauded for his insightful and provocative approach to the formation of foreign

policy in the early republic. He offers a new perspective in which ideas assume a centrality in diplomatic strategy, but are symbiotically linked to the concept of domestic union. Thoroughly grounded in the appropriate primary sources, but with due consideration of recent historiography, Lewis' points are clear, precise, and well reasoned. Historians comfortable with the Jeffersonian era will find no new revelations in terms of events or the public posture of the major figures. Nor will the reader develop a personal or intellectual intimacy with the policy makers. Lewis' figures reveal their views, but with little passion. Some may question the author's contention that a continuance of the War of 1812 might have spelled the end of the constitution or the assumption about the naivete of the president and leading cabinet figures regarding Jackson's invasion of Florida. These minor quibbles aside, scholars of foreign policy, politics, and culture will benefit from this soundly argued volume.

Notes:

[1]. John J. Johnson, *A Hemisphere Apart: The Foundations of United States Foreign Policy Toward Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990); William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992); Lester D. Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University, 1996); Frank L. Owsley, Jr. and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

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